

PR

4963

.R6

NUNC COGNOSCO EX PARTE



THOMAS J. BATA LIBRARY
TRENT UNIVERSITY

THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

Pamphlet No. 67

Lord Macaulay:
the Pre-eminent Victorian

By

S. C. Roberts

August, 1927

NUNC COGNOSCO EX PARTE



TRENT UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

Pamphlet No. 67

Lord Macaulay:
the Pre-eminent Victorian

By

S. C. Roberts

August, 1927

PR 4963. R6

PRINTED IN ENGLAND AT THE
UNIVERSITY PRESS, OXFORD
BY JOHN JOHNSON
PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY

LORD MACAULAY—THE PRE-EMINENT VICTORIAN

THE seriousness of the effort now being made to discover and appreciate the *ethos* of the Victorian Age is a noteworthy fact of current criticism. But a few years ago we used the phrase 'Victorianism' merely as a contemptuous synonym for middle-class respectability; to-day it is a favourite topic not only for casual gossip, but for serious discussion, even for professorial lectures. Victorianism, indeed, has already assumed the dignity of an historical phase; there is every indication that a few years hence it will have acquired the solemnity of a cult. This development is largely, I suppose, a time-process. Even I, a somewhat late Victorian, find it difficult to remember, when discussing the matter with undergraduates, that none of them lived under the dominion of the great Queen—and yet, to the children of my generation it seemed impossible that Victoria should die, that the word 'King' should come into the Book of Common Prayer, that distinguished advocates should put anything but 'Q.C.' after their names; and when the impossible happened, we listened wonderingly while our elders went about and said to each other in all seriousness: 'Don't you feel as if you had lost a mother?'

But now Victorianism is something different. It is no longer just the besetting sin of one's parents. As it becomes more and more remote, it gathers round it all the interest of a past civilization, all the picturesqueness of the antique.

This change of perspective is exemplified in a hundred ways:

An old gentleman is described as 'a picturesque figure in side-whiskers who goes into the city every day in a top-hat'; the top-hat, it should be noted, is now accounted to the old gentleman for aesthetic righteousness—it gives him 'character'. A generation ago it would have stamped him as a Philistine.

Similarly, with mid-Victorian furniture, while we may still contend that the bulk of it is intrinsically ugly, it is gradually becoming fashionable to qualify such condemnation by a good word for the sound workmanship, the solidity, the quality of the material. The horsehair sofa is no longer merely antiquated; it is antique—and, before I die, I am prepared to hear a collector talk enthusiastically about a genuine 1870 antimacassar.

Everywhere we may note this larger geniality now displayed towards the Victorian Age: Mr. Michael Sadleir, in his noble championship of Trollope, finds himself in honesty compelled to defend the mid-Victorian England which Trollope represented; Mr. Laurence Housman, in his imaginary dialogues, cherishes, with sentimental care, what he describes as the bloom upon the Victorian grape; even the ironic spirit of Mr. Lytton Strachey seems to suffer a sea change under the influence of the study of Victoria herself.

But it is time to recall Mr. Sadleir's very salutary warning against loose talk about 'Victorianism' as a whole. What profit, indeed, can there be in any attempt to affix a common label to the work, say, of John Stuart Mill, Robert Browning, and Mr. Max Beerbohm?

But if we limit ourselves to the period of Early Victorianism (that is, the period 1837 to 1850), we may at any rate be able to discern certain foundations of the social and political philosophy of the period; and the broadest of these foundations were Decency and *Laissez-faire*.¹

Of the Early Victorian standard of decency it may be said first, that it represented a reaction against the jovial licence of social life in the eighteenth century and in the Regency period; and secondly, that it was maintained at its full height by the influence of the Evangelical movement and the influence of the Court life of Victoria herself. It was not that the Early Victorian reader was incapable of enjoying, say, *Tom Jones*; but his enjoyment was subject to those qualifications which were codified by Thackeray in his *Lectures on the English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*. What no Early Victorian could understand was Fielding's own claim that in *Tom Jones* the reader would find 'nothing inconsistent with the strictest Rules of Decency'. The Rules had been altered; and perhaps one of the simplest illustrations of their revision is to be found in a comparison between the description of Mr. Pickwick's famous adventure with a middle-aged lady in yellow curl-papers at the Great White Horse at Ipswich and Fielding's description of how the hapless Parson Adams climbed inadvertently into Mrs. Slipslop's bed. It is not a question of the ethical superiority of the Early Victorians. Parson Adams was at least as good a moralist as Mr. Pickwick. The change lies in the matter of decency.

Laissez-faire was, of course, the central doctrine of the political philosophy of the Early Victorians. Jeremy Bentham, in his formulation of his theory of the greatest happiness of the greatest number

¹ A pamphlet entitled *The End of Laissez-Faire* was recently published; a similar pamphlet, *The End of Decency*, may be expected—perhaps from America.

as the measure of right and wrong, laid the foundations of that social and political structure which was subsequently built by the philosophic Radicals and the economists of the Manchester School.

Early Victorian Liberalism did not, indeed, blindly follow in the Benthamite path, but it remained loyal to the basic principles of Utility, Democracy, and Individual Liberty; and when the Victorians were confronted with demands for change, which had been intensified, though not created, by international and economic upheaval, their answer was in effect what their greatest poet was to say in another context: 'Let us alone'—let us alone to buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest market; let us be free of trade-restrictions and you shall have things cheap; let us alone—and enlightened self-interest, the stimulus of competition, and a Parliamentary vote will do the rest.

Now it is significant that many of the famous names which are at once suggested by the mention of the Early Victorian period are, as a matter of fact, associated not with a glorification of, but with a violent attack upon, the theory and practice of *Laissez-faire*. Carlyle and Ruskin regarded it as the greatest of social stumbling-blocks; Newman looked upon Liberalism as the broad end of the atheistic wedge; and, at a rather later date, Matthew Arnold traced the more noisome weeds of Philistinism to the seeds sown by Early and Mid-Victorian Radicals. Even Dickens and Tennyson had misgivings about what Carlyle had called the Condition-of-England Question. Honest doubt, if not open scepticism, about the glory and the greatness of the Victorian Age, very frequently coloured the attitude of the greatest of the Victorians themselves.

But if we look for the expression of a rosy faith in Early Victorian England, of a joyous thankfulness for having lived in so glorious an epoch, there is at any rate one exponent of the faith, whose work lies ready to our hand—I mean the pre-eminent figure of Thomas Babington Macaulay.

Macaulay's early days were spent in the right Evangelical atmosphere. Zachary Macaulay, his father, was a prominent member of the Clapham Sect and the intimate friend and colleague of Wilberforce, Buxton, and other leaders of the Abolitionist movement. It is with little surprise that we learn that the elder Macaulay frowned upon novel-reading—especially before noon. Dram-drinking in the morning, he called it.

One feels that eighteenth-century fiction, in particular, must have been a source of some heart-searching to Zachary Macaulay, and it must be set down to his credit that when, as editor of a

journal called *The Christian Observer*, he received an anonymous contribution eulogizing the works of Fielding and Smollett, he had the magnanimity to print it. Down upon the editorial head came the violent wrath of his subscribers; one of them announced his intention not only of ceasing to take the paper, but of consigning the offensive number to the flames. Meanwhile the editor had learned that the guilty contributor was his own thirteen-year-old son. On the face of it this may seem to suggest a divergence on the part of the Macaulays from the Victorian standard of decency. But here Macaulay's attitude was qualified by his literary voracity—an attitude defined at a later date in his essay on the Restoration dramatists.

It would perhaps be unjustifiable to claim infant precocity as a peculiarly Victorian quality, though there are few records more staggering in this respect than those of Ruskin and John Stuart Mill. Certainly Macaulay can vie with the most notorious of nursery prodigies. A literary critic at the age of thirteen, he was a poet at the age of seven, and the manuscript of one of the many hymns referred to by his mother in a letter written in 1808 has since been reproduced:

Almighty God of all below,
Thou canst protect from every foe;
The Heavens are made by thy great hands,
One word of thee the Earth commands.
Some men make Gods of red and blue
And rob their Sovereign of his due:
The good shall go to Heaven. The fell
Blasts of thy wrath can bear to hell.

It is perhaps not altogether fanciful to note as characteristic both the ease with which the infant hymnologist divides mankind into two classes and the sureness with which he forecasts their respective destinies.

Macaulay was not sent to a public school, but to a private establishment at Little Shelford, kept by a clergyman, the strictness of whose Evangelicalism was above suspicion, though certain elements of geniality were admitted into the sacred gloom of the Early Victorian Sabbath:

'My dear Papa (wrote Thomas on 26 April 1813),

'Since I have given you a detail of weekly duties, I hope you will be pleased to be informed of my Sunday's occupations. It is quite a day of rest here, and I really look to it with pleasure through the whole of the week. After breakfast we learn a chapter in the Greek Testament, that is with the aid of our Bibles, and without doing it with a

dictionary like other lessons. We then go to church. We dine almost as soon as we come back, and we are left to ourselves till afternoon church. During this time I employ myself in reading, and Mr. Preston lends me any books for which I ask him, so that I am nearly as well off in this respect as at home, except for one thing, which, though I believe it is useful, is not very pleasant. I can only ask for one book at a time, and cannot touch another till I have read it through. We then go to church, and after we come back I read as before till tea-time. After tea we write out the sermon. I cannot help thinking that Mr. Preston uses all imaginable means to make us forget it, for he gives us a glass of wine each on Sunday, and on Sunday only, the very day when we want to have all our faculties awake: and some do literally go to sleep during the sermon, and look rather silly when they wake. I, however, have not fallen into this disaster.'

One further letter belonging to Macaulay's schoolboy period deserves quotation as showing the extraordinarily mature view which he took of current history. He writes from Shelford on 11 April 1814:

'My dear Mama,

'The news is glorious indeed. Peace! Peace with a Bourbon, with a descendant of Henri Quatre, with a prince who is bound to us by all the ties of gratitude. I have some hopes that it will be a lasting peace; that the troubles of the last twenty years may make kings and nations wiser. I cannot conceive a greater punishment to Buonaparte than that which the allies have inflicted on him. How can his ambitious mind support it? All his great projects and schemes which once made every throne in Europe tremble, are buried in the solitude of an Italian isle. How miraculously everything has been conducted! We almost seem to hear the Almighty saying to the fallen tyrant, "For this cause have I raised thee up, that I might show in thee My power."'

There is here no question of pose. The letter was intended solely for the domestic circle; both the rhetoric and the dramatic view of history are entirely spontaneous and characteristic.

At the end of the letter he turns to another subject, the controversy between the Clapham sect and Dr. Herbert Marsh:

'I saw to-day that greatest of churchmen, that pillar of Orthodoxy, that true friend to the Liturgy, that mortal enemy to the Bible Society—Herbert Marsh, D.D., Professor of Divinity on Lady Margaret's foundation. I stood looking at him for about ten minutes, and shall always continue to maintain that he is a very ill-favoured gentleman as far as outward appearance is concerned.'

At Trinity College, Cambridge, Macaulay was supremely happy—except for the Mathematics. Of the fellowship which he won in

{ 1824 he was probably prouder than any other distinction which came to him in later life:

‘I can never remember the time’, says his biographer, ‘when it was not diligently impressed upon me that, if I minded my syntax, I might eventually hope to reach a position which would give me three hundred pounds a year, a stable for my horse, six dozen of audit ale every Christmas, a loaf and two pats of butter every morning, a good dinner for nothing, with as many almonds and raisins as I could eat at dessert.’

Whether these Victorian attractions are still dangled before the eyes of aspirants to Trinity fellowships I do not stay to inquire.

Macaulay’s subsequent career may be summed up in two words—Politics and Literature; in 1825 there appeared his first contribution to the *Edinburgh Review*—the essay on Milton—and in 1830 he entered Parliament. It was characteristic that with all his vast range of reading, his fine scholarship, his fluent style, and his early connexion with the *Edinburgh Review*, Macaulay did not contemplate a purely literary career. The possibility of ‘writing to relieve not the fulness of the mind but the emptiness of the pocket’ was abhorrent to him. At that time, moreover, the theory and the practice of politics held an attraction for brilliant young men which is rarely felt by the young lions of to-day. To the Victorians politics really mattered, and though Macaulay first made his mark in London by a critical essay on Milton, politics and political subjects quickly claimed him for their own. From Milton he turned to Machiavelli and Hallam and Southey and James Mill. As early as 1826 Crabb Robinson described him as ‘Overflowing with words and not poor in thought. Liberal in opinion, but no radical.’ Macaulay was thus eminently fitted to be a protagonist in the Reform Bill movement, and the fact that he distrusted the political theories of the Utilitarians, whose principles were at the bottom of much of the political development of the nineteenth century, does not make him any the less representative of his age. As Leslie Stephen said, ‘he ought by all his intellectual sympathies to be a Utilitarian’; but probably he distrusted their theories not so much because they were Utilitarian, as because they were theories. Macaulay, indeed, was ashamed of the youthful arrogance of his attack upon James Mill and suppressed the essays; but one sentence from the end of the second essay is worth quoting:

‘Our fervent wish and we will add our sanguine hope is that we may see such a reform in the House of Commons as may render its votes the express image of the opinion of the middle orders of Britain.’

Similarly in the essay on Hallam, Macaulay wrote:

‘A great statesman might, by judicious and timely reformatations, by reconciling the two great branches of the natural aristocracy, the capitalists and the landowners, and by so widening the base of the government as to interest in its defence the whole of the middle class, that brave, honest and sound-hearted class, which is as anxious for the maintenance of order and the security of property as it is hostile to corruption and oppression, succeed in averting a struggle to which no rational friend of liberty or of law can look forward without great apprehensions.’

Here is the characteristic Victorian alliance between the new middle class of traders and the old landowners—what Matthew Arnold would have called an unholy alliance between Philistines and Barbarians. What of Arnold’s third class, the Populace? Their view was expressed a few weeks after the passing of the Reform Bill, in a journal called *The Poor Man’s Guardian*, in which the Bill was described as a ‘damnable delusion, giving us as many tyrants as there are shopkeepers’. But to Macaulay any suggestion of universal suffrage was something to be regarded with pious horror—he was ‘Liberal in opinion, but no radical’.

From 1834 to 1838 Macaulay served as a Member of the Supreme Council of India. The motives which had led him to accept the office were frankly stated in a letter to his sister. His family would be partially dependent upon him; he wished to live like a gentleman and his political activities did not allow him sufficient time to earn a decent living by his pen. In India his salary would be £10,000 per annum, of which he would save half; in five years he would be able to return to England with a snug little fortune of £30,000. Material comfort and security, conditions which were essential to the development of the Victorian mentality, were assured.

‘Without a competence,’ Macaulay wrote to Lord Lansdowne shortly before his departure for India, ‘it is not very easy for a public man to be honest; it is almost impossible for him to be thought so.’ But Macaulay was no doubt equally honest in his view of the opportunity which India afforded: ‘I can scarcely conceive a nobler field’, he wrote, ‘than that which our Indian Empire now presents to a statesman.’

Macaulay’s Indian years, like all his years, were crowded; and statesmanship and literature are mingled almost inextricably in the record of them. For the voyage he provided himself with Richardson, Voltaire, Gibbon, Sismondi, Davila, the *Orlando* in Italian, *Don Quixote* in Spanish, Homer in Greek, Horace in Latin. Many a

post-Victorian has similarly determined to use the opportunity of a long voyage for the study of this or that great author; the difference between him and Lord Macaulay is that Macaulay actually read the books. Nor was the stream of his productivity abated. The drafting of notes on the Indian Penal Code, of State Papers on the Calcutta Press, of the famous Education Minute still left him time to write the essay on Bacon; and in the margins of his editions of the classics there were to be found the *disjecta membra* of a political diary. Thus, on the first page of Theocritus there was entered a note of Lord W. Bentinck sailing on 20 March 1835; on the last page of the *De Amicitia* a note that Lord Auckland had arrived at Government House and been sworn in on 5 March 1836; beneath an idyll of Moschus a note of Sir Robert Peel being First Lord of the Treasury.

After Macaulay's return to England in 1838, it was not long before he embarked upon the work which was to represent in the fullest sense the application of his literary power to the political story of England. The plan of the *History* is briefly outlined in a letter of 20 July 1838; it is to begin with the Revolution of 1688 and the death of George IV is suggested as the most suitable *terminus ad quem*:

‘The History would then be an entire view of all the transactions which took place between the Revolution which brought the Crown into harmony with the Parliament and the Revolution which brought the Parliament into harmony with the nation.’

But the project, ambitious as it was, did not involve any kind of retirement to the ‘shelter of academic bowers’. The work of writing was begun in 1839, the year in which Macaulay re-entered Parliament and became Secretary at War; and it is highly characteristic that Macaulay, a minister in an Early Victorian Whig Cabinet, should have planned his *History* to cover the period in which, as he saw it, the triumph of Whiggery should be progressively displayed. He saw the history of England's past as a great drama in which the heroic parts were played by those who had fought for constitutional liberty not as for the sublime aim of a consistent political theory, but as for a practical good which was essential to an ordered, civilized, and democratic government. ‘No man’, says Cotter Morrison, ‘was ever less of a philosopher or more of a politician than Macaulay. He had an eye to business, not to abstract truth.’

But, of course, Macaulay had an eye to a great deal more. What has been called his mastery of *mise-en-scène* made his *History* a kind

of revelation to the eager thousands who rushed to buy it—a revelation of the picturesque and dramatic elements in the story of English political progress. Nothing like it had been written before, and Macaulay, like all good artists, knew quite well what he was doing: ‘There is merit, no doubt,’ he wrote in his Diary, ‘in Hume, Robertson, Voltaire, and Gibbon. Yet it is not the thing. I have a conception of history more just, I am confident, than theirs.’ This is not conceit. It is the conscious and confident artistry of the creator of a new literary form. It is exactly the same note as that struck in the previous century by Boswell in relation to biography and by Fielding in relation to fiction.

With a buoyant belief, then, both in his own power of presentation and in the material which English history provided for a graphic record of constitutional progress, Macaulay completed his first two volumes for publication in 1848. The date has a certain significance. It was the year in which nearly every country in Europe had its revolution and in which the Chartists had their meeting for the presentation of their monster petition.

Carlyle’s rhetoric became more and more gloomy:

‘High shouts of exultation, in every dialect, by every vehicle of speech and writing, rise from far and near over this last avatar of Democracy in 1848; and yet, to wise minds, the first aspect it presents seems rather to be one of boundless misery and sorrow. . . . To the great mass of men, I am aware, the matter presents itself quite on this hopeful side. Democracy they consider to be a kind of “Government”. The old model, formed long since, and brought to perfection in England now 200 years ago, has proclaimed itself to all Nations as the new healing for every wo. . . . The contrary of all this is deeply manifest to me . . . and the farther I look into the roots of all this, the more hateful, ruinous and dismal does the state of mind all this could have originated in appear to me.’

Ruskin was more temperate, but equally solemn:

‘The aspect of the years that approach us is as solemn as it is full of mystery; and the weight of evil against which we have to contend is increasing like the letting out of water. . . . The blasphemies of the earth are sounding louder, and its miseries heaped heavier every day. . . .’

From these forebodings it is interesting to turn to the famous opening of the Third Chapter of Macaulay’s *History*. If Macaulay’s belief in Early Victorian civilization is implicit in all his writings, it is most clearly and concisely explicit in this chapter:

‘If we would study with profit the history of our ancestors, we must

be constantly on our guard against that delusion which the well-known names of families, places, and offices naturally produce, and must never forget that the country of which we read was a very different country from that in which we live. In every experimental science there is a tendency towards perfection. In every human being there is a wish to ameliorate his own condition. . . . No ordinary misfortune, nor ordinary misgovernment, will do so much to make a nation wretched, as the constant progress of physical knowledge and the constant effort of every man to better himself will do to make a nation prosperous.'

{ There is the word of the true believer in progress, in the effort of the individual to better himself.

'It has often been found that profuse expenditure, heavy taxation, absurd commercial restrictions, corrupt tribunals, disastrous wars, seditions, persecutions, conflagrations, inundations, have not been able to destroy capital as fast as the exertions of private citizens have been able to create it.'

— There is the Victorian faith in *Laissez-faire*.

'In consequence partly of our geographical and partly of our moral position, we have, during several generations, been exempt from evils which have elsewhere impeded the efforts and destroyed the fruits of industry.'

There is the Victorian pride in insularity—the thankfulness that England is not as other nations are.

{ 'Every man has felt entire confidence that the state would protect him in the possession of what has been earned by his diligence and hoarded by his self-denial.'

There is the Victorian glorification of self-help. Macaulay had a profound distrust of paternal government, but the State would help those who helped themselves.

'Under the benignant influence of peace and liberty, science has flourished and has been applied to practical purposes on a scale never before known. The consequence is that a change to which the history of the old world furnishes no parallel has taken place in our country.'

* There is the triumphant note of Victorian optimism. It was an age without parallel.

To see a cold shower of scorn poured upon this enthusiastic fire we may turn to the journal of John Mitchel, the Irish agitator, who was sentenced to fourteen years' transportation in this same year 1848. On board ship he read Macaulay's *Essays*, for want of something better, as he is careful to add, and in his Diary he wrote:

'He is a born Edinburgh Reviewer, this Macaulay, and indeed a type-reviewer—an authentic specimen-page of nineteenth-century literature. He has the right omniscient tone and air and the true knack of administering reverential flattery to British civilization, British prowess, honour, enlightenment, and all that, especially to the great nineteenth century and its astounding civilization, that is, to his readers. It is altogether a new thing in the history of mankind, this triumphant glorification of a current century upon being the century it is. No former age, before Christ or after, ever took any pride in itself and sneered at the wisdom of its ancestors; and the new phenomenon indicates, I believe, not higher wisdom, but deeper stupidity.'

This is more frankly brutal criticism than that to which Macaulay was subjected by later Victorians, but the opening pages of the Third Chapter are almost in themselves sufficient to show why Macaulay has been pilloried as the Prince of Philistines. One of his weaknesses was particularly open to attack—his dislike and contempt of abstract speculation. True, he loved Plato, but not chiefly, as his biographer admits, for the sake of Plato's metaphysics. He read the *Republic* with the eyes of a Whig and an Englishman, and his sweeping view of the futility of the ancient philosophers is expressed with characteristic vehemence in the essay on Bacon:

'They promised what was impracticable; they despised what was practicable; they filled the world with long words and long beards; and they left it as wicked and as ignorant as they found it.'

Here, as elsewhere, Macaulay, one of the finest scholars of his time, seems entirely out of sympathy with the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. It would, of course, be unfair to maintain that this is a peculiarly Victorian paradox; for in every academic system there is the inherent danger that amongst its prizemen it may produce scholars of wide reading, tenacious memory, and correct expression who may be fundamentally unintellectual. I hope it is not disloyal to add that this is a danger to which Cambridge scholarship, with its fine traditions of soundness and accuracy, is especially liable; I hope similarly that it is not impolite to conjecture that the dangers, which may conceivably be incurred in another place, of brilliant dialectic built upon the sands of imperfect knowledge are dangers greater than those to which the Cambridge man is exposed.

About Macaulay's deficiency in this matter there can be no doubt; and his imagination was similarly limited. This again may sound paradoxical, since critics are agreed, and indeed it is obvious, that no historian has presented the past with greater vividness of effect.

But this was the work of a purely historical, not an intellectual, imagination—a power which Macaulay had of visualising an historic scene and depicting it in graphic detail. Local colour was there in abundance, but Macaulay's sense of values was always that of the Whig optimist. Where his imagination failed was in picturing to himself, even dimly, a world which might have a scale of values entirely different from that of the cultured member of the Victorian civilization, a world in which the criterion of reality was not applicability to, but independence of, material result, a world in which values were absolute.

It was with this pictorial, unintellectual imagination that Macaulay approached the subject of poetry. It would be unfair, perhaps, to assess his poetical judgment too strictly by the opinions expressed in the essay on Milton. Nevertheless, there is something fundamental in Macaulay's view of poetry as producing an illusion on the eye of the mind, and in the antithesis between the light of knowledge on the one hand and the phantoms of the poet on the other:

‘We cannot’, he says, ‘unite the incompatible advantages of reality and deception, the clear discernment of truth and the exquisite enjoyment of fiction.’

Reality and deception—the clear-cut division is characteristic. The poet may create beautiful fantasies out of his peculiar imagination, but a breath of solid fact may at any time blow them sky-high. Poetry, unless it be an historical record in verse, is a fairy-tale for grown-ups. What of Macaulay's own poetry? From the time of its publication onwards the collection of *Lays of Ancient Rome* was the Victorian child's guide to poetry. If the Victorian school-boy (the real school-boy—not the omniscient stripling created by Macaulay in his own image) had never heard anything else about Macaulay, he would at any rate remember the creator of Lars Porsena, of false Sextus, of the ranks of Tuscany, of the good logs of Algidus, of

The priest who slew the slayer
And shall himself be slain.

Matthew Arnold's onslaught is, of course, almost as famous as the *Lays* themselves:

‘To my mind a man's power to detect the ring of false metal in those Lays is a good measure of his fitness to give an opinion about poetical matters:

To every man upon this earth
Death cometh soon or late

it is hard to read without a cry of pain.’

Well, I repeat, we all read and learnt the lines as children and we probably did so without exclamations of critical anguish.

In certain stanzas, indeed, any one with an elementary critical sense will find the jingle of the sentimental antiphonies almost unbearable:

Then none was for a party;
 Then all were for the state;
 Then the great man helped the poor,
 And the poor man loved the great.

The even mutuality of rich and poor is like the ceremony of 'setting-to-partners' in a Victorian set of Lancers.

On the other hand:

And nearer fast and nearer
 Doth the red whirlwind come;
 And louder still and still more loud,
 From underneath that rolling cloud
 Is heard the trumpet's war-note proud,
 The trampling, and the hum.
 And plainly and more plainly
 Now through the gloom appears,
 Far to left and far to right,
 In broken gleams of dark-blue light,
 The long array of helmets bright,
 The long array of spears.

That is vivid and descriptive verse conveying exactly what the writer means to convey in rapid and appropriate language.

For myself, I believe that the truest word about the *Lays*, as about some other matters, has been said by Mr. Saintsbury:

'They have the special merit that liking for them will mature into liking for greater poetry still. The *Lays* in a certain, and only a certain sense, may be milk for babes; but good milk is a great deal better than tainted meat and unsound wine.'

Side by side in the collection of Macaulay's miscellaneous poems may be found two astonishing pieces:

By those white cliffs I never more must see,
 By that dear language which I spake like thee,
 Forget all feuds, and shed one English tear
 O'er English dust. A broken heart lies here.

If any one still believes that the heroic couplet is an inadequate medium for emotional expression, let him read the *Epitaph on a Jacobite*, the *tour de force* of a Victorian Whig. The other piece,

The Last Buccaneer, may seem at first sight just another experiment in the manner of the ballad; but something more is here:

From St. Jago's wealthy port, from Havannah's royal fort,
The seaman goes forth without fear:
For since that stormy night not a mortal hath had sight
Of the flag of the last Buccaneer.

Reality and deception—In which world are we? Is the last Buccaneer more, or less, real than Lars Porsena?

But as an influence upon Victorian taste, Macaulay the essayist was even more powerful than Macaulay the historian or Macaulay the poet. It is doubtful indeed whether any collection of essays has had a greater effect upon the critical standards of ordinary English readers than had Macaulay's, both for his own and for succeeding generations.

The most notorious example, perhaps, is that of his treatment of Boswell and Johnson. Macaulay, an artist himself, gave Boswell's artistic triumph its proper praise:

'Homer is not more decidedly the first of heroic poets, Shakespeare is not more decidedly the first of dramatists, Demosthenes is not more decidedly the first of orators, than Boswell is the first of biographers. He has no second. He has distanced all his competitors so decidedly, that it is not worth while to place them. Eclipse is first, and the rest nowhere.'

So far, so good. But when Macaulay begins to contemplate Boswell the Man, what does he find? He finds to his horror—the horror of the enthusiastic Victorian—that Boswell was a man of no academic distinction, a man who was frequently tipsy and frequently involved in disreputable love-affairs, a man—but why feebly try to paraphrase Macaulay himself?

'Servile and impertinent, shallow and pedantic, a bigot and a sot, bloated with family pride and eternally blustering about the dignity of a born gentleman, yet stooping to be a tale-bearer, an eavesdropper, a common butt in the taverns of London.'

Macaulay, the great master of picturesque antithesis, is faced with an antithesis which he cannot explain—and then comes his astonishing attempt at a solution:

'Other great writers (he says), Goldsmith, for instance, had their weaknesses, but these men attained literary eminence in spite of their weaknesses. Boswell attained it by reason of his weaknesses. If he had not been a great fool, he would never have been a great writer.'

Thus was born the famous 'inspired idiot' theory of James Boswell.

To-day, perhaps, it is almost unnecessary to refute such a fantastic *lucus a non lucendo*. Macaulay's essay was indeed soon followed by a juster estimate of Boswell made by Thomas Carlyle, but it was Macaulay's view which determined the Victorian attitude towards Boswell's achievement. Such was the vogue of the *Essays* that it was almost literally true that every Victorian school-boy knew something of the essay on Boswell's Johnson. The tragedy was that, until quite recently, it was often the only thing about Boswell that he did know.

To Johnson himself Macaulay did a greater measure of justice. But here again the kind of emphasis which Macaulay laid on Johnson's oddity of bearing, his table manners, his slovenly dress, his misery in Grub Street, his dismissal by Mrs. Thrale, did much to conventionalize the Victorian view of the Great Lexicographer. It was left for the late Sir Walter Raleigh and other critics to restore the true perspective of the Johnson picture, not only by a fresh study of Boswell, but by a revaluation of Johnson's own work as scholar and critic.

Another essay which reveals in a special sense the Victorian attitude towards literature is that which treats of the Comic Dramatists of the Restoration. At once Macaulay was faced with the questions of decency and morality.

'The plays to which he [i.e. Leigh Hunt] now acts as introducer are, with few exceptions, such as, in the opinion of many very respectable people, ought not to be reprinted. In this opinion we can by no means concur. We cannot wish that any work or class of works which has exercised a great influence on the human mind, and which illustrates the character of an important epoch in letters, politics and morals, should disappear from the world. If we err in this matter, we err with the gravest men and bodies of men in the empire and especially with the Church of England and with the great schools of learning which are connected with her. . . . The Athenian Comedies in which there are scarcely a hundred lines together without some passage of which Rochester would have been ashamed, have been reprinted at the Pitt Press and the Clarendon Press under the direction of syndics and delegates appointed by the Universities and have been illustrated with notes by reverend, very reverend, and right reverend commentators.'

Macaulay had the common sense to see that a student who was allowed to read Aristophanes and Catullus must not be debarred from *The Country Wife* and *The Way of the World*. Even decency must modify its claims when faced with the honest demands of scholarship. But what was inadmissible and indeed incomprehen-

sible by Macaulay was that the characters in Restoration Comedy should be judged, as Lamb claimed, as inhabitants of a region where 'no cold moral reigned'.

'The question', wrote Macaulay, 'is simply this, whether a man of genius who constantly and systematically endeavours to make this sort of character [i.e. the town-rake, the woman of the town] attractive by uniting it with beauty, grace, dignity, spirit, a high social position, popularity, literature, wit, taste, knowledge of the world, brilliant success in every undertaking, does or does not make an ill use of his powers. We own that we are unable to understand how this question can be answered in any way but one.'

There is the triumphant Victorian conclusion. Whether Macaulay or Charles Lamb is right is not the immediate question. The point is rather that nowhere do we find the Victorian view expressed with such magnificent confidence and certainty as in the pages of Macaulay. In his belief in the Abolition of Slavery, in *Laissez-faire*, in Constitutional Democracy, and in the other principles of Victorian Liberalism, Macaulay was very far from standing alone. But not many in his own, or in later generations, could rise to such a certainty of moral and political conviction. Many of the questions which are ranged under the head of Life, or Art, or Being (questions which tend to acquire a speculative or even a metaphysical character) held no interest for Macaulay. But of those questions which did interest him he was commonly able to say and to feel that he could not understand how they could be answered in any way but one.

Happy are the people who have no doubts, even if they purchase their certainty at the expense of imagination. Macaulay had no doubts—even about the Great Exhibition of 1851:

'Everything was exhilarating and the temper of the multitude the best possible. . . . There is just as much chance of a revolution in England as of the falling of the moon. I made my way into the building; a most gorgeous sight; vast; graceful; beyond the dreams of the Arabian romances. I cannot think that the Caesars ever exhibited a more splendid spectacle.'

There at the heart of Victorian splendour let us leave the figure of Lord Macaulay—serene, successful, pre-eminent.

ESSAYS AND STUDIES

Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association. Vol. I.

Collected by A. C. Bradley. Clarendon Press. 3s. to members.

Contents:—English Place-names, by Henry Bradley; On the Present State of English Pronunciation, by Robert Bridges; Browning, by W. P. Ker; Blind Harry's 'Wallace', by George Neilson; Shakespeare and the Grand Style, by George Saintsbury; Some Suggestions about Bad Poetry, by Edith Sichel; Carlyle and his German Masters, by C. E. Vaughan.

Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association. Vol. II.

Collected by Dr. Beeching. Clarendon Press. 3s. to members.

Contents:—The Particle *ing* in Place-names, by H. Alexander; On the Nature of the Grand Style, by John Bailey; Richardson's Novels and their Influences, by F. S. Boas; Jane Austen, by A. C. Bradley; Description in Poetry, by A. Clutton-Brock; The Literary Play, by C. E. Montague; A Yorkshire Folk-Play and its Analogues, by F. Moorman.

Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association. Vol. III.

Collected by W. P. Ker. Clarendon Press. 3s. to members.

Contents:—What English Poetry may still learn from Greek, by Gilbert Murray; Some Childish Things, by A. A. Jack; *A Lover's Complaint*, by J. W. Mackail; Arnold and Homer, by T. S. Omond; Keats's Epithets, by David Watson Rannie; Dante and the Grand Style, by George Saintsbury; Blake's Religious Lyrics, by H. C. Beeching.

Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association. Vol. IV.

Collected by C. H. Herford. Clarendon Press. 3s. to members.

Contents:—A Note on Dramatic Criticism, by J. E. Spingarn; English Prose Numbers, by O. Elton; Some Unconsidered Elements in English Place-names, by A. Mawar; Platonism in Shelley, by L. Winstanley; Defoe's *True-born Englishman*, by A. C. Guthkelch; The Plays of Mr. John Galsworthy, by A. R. Skemp; Dramatic Technique in Marlowe, by G. P. Baker.

Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association. Vol. V.

Collected by Oliver Elton. Clarendon Press. 3s. to members.

Contents:—Rhythm in English Verse, Prose, and Speech, by D. S. MacColl; The Novels of Mark Rutherford, by A. E. Taylor; English Place-names and Teutonic Sagas, by F. W. Moorman; Shelley's *Triumph of Life*, by F. Melian Stawell; Emily Brontë, by J. C. Smith; Translation from the Old into Modern English, by A. Blyth Webster.

Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association. Vol. VI.

Collected by A. C. Bradley. Clarendon Press. 3s. 6d. to members.

Contents:—The 'Cædmonian' Genesis, by Henry Bradley; The Humanist Ideal, by W. P. Ker; Trollope Revisited, by George Saintsbury; On Playing the Sedulous Ape, by George Sampson; Conrad, by F. Melian Stawell; South-Eastern and South-East Midland Dialects, by H. C. Wyld.

Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association. Vol. VII.

Collected by John Bailey. Clarendon Press. 3s. 6d. to members.

Contents:—Rhyme in English Poetry, by B. de Sélincourt; Words and Music in Song, by A. H. Fox Strangways; Thomas Parnell; or, What was wrong with the Eighteenth Century, by A. H. Cruickshank; A Contemporary Light upon John Donne, by John Sampson; A Bundle of Ballads, by Geo. Neilson; The 1604 Text of Marlowe's 'Doctor Faustus', by Percy Simpson.

Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association. Vol. VIII.

Collected by G. C. Moore Smith. Clarendon Press. 3s. 6d. to members.

Contents:—Tragedy, by J. S. Smart; The Felon Sew, by George H. Cowling; On the Meanings of Certain Terms in the Anglo-Saxon Charters, by G. B. Grundy; Mysticism in English Poetry, by A. Hamilton Thompson; Romanticism in the Modern World, by C. H. Herford; Hazlitt, by W. P. Ker; English Grammar and Grammars, by R. B. McKerrow.

Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association. Vol. IX.

Collected by W. P. Ker. Clarendon Press. 3s. 6d. to members.

Date Due

Contents : of the 'Ar Righteous Edith C. F Writings o Teaching Literature	7th					Language te, and the Ballads, by Genius and y; On the in English
Essays and Collec ment	NOV 2 1975	NOV 27 1970				Vol. X. 3s. 6d. to
Contents : Second Q 1635, by Holmes ; Allan Rar	NOV 7 1977					rints in the rbett, 1582- y Elizabeth iver Elton ;
Essays and Collec	NOV 2 1980	BATA JUN 8 1980				Vol. XI. members.
Contents : Words and Poetry, b Novel, by Chapman	OCT 27 1998	DEC 4 1979				artin; The Anglo-Saxon th-Century V. Routh ;
Essays and Collec		NOV				Vol. XII. members.
Contents : Thomas J Edition o Critics, b Archibald Origin, by					1980	ociations of for a New ene and its innings, by orship and
THE						DIES

CAT. NO. 23 233

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

- Vol. I. 1919-20. Edited by Sir Sidney Lee.
- Vol. II. 1920-1. Edited by Sir Sidney Lee and F. S. Boas.
- Vol. III. 1922. Edited by Sir Sidney Lee and F. S. Boas.
- Vol. IV. 1923. Edited by Sir Sidney Lee and F. S. Boas.
- Vol. V. 1924. Edited by Dr. F. S. Boas and Dr. C. H. Herford.
- Vol. VI. 1925. Edited by Dr. F. S. Boas and Dr. C. H. Herford.
- Clarendon Press. 3s. 6d. to members.

Poems of To-day. An Anthology. Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd. Price (stiff paper) 2s. ; (cloth) with biographical notes, 3s. 6d.

Poems of To-day. An Anthology. 2nd Series. Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd. Price (stiff paper) 2s. ; (cloth) with biographical notes, 3s. 6d.

Poems of To-day. An Anthology. 1st and 2nd Series. Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd. Price 7s. 6d. (white buckram), 12s. 6d. (leather).

The Essentials of English Teaching. Longmans, Green & Co. Price 6d. to members ; postage 1d.

A COPY OF THIS PAMPHLET is supplied to all full members of the Association. They can obtain further copies (price 1s., postage extra) on application to A. V. HOUGHTON, the Secretary of the Association, 4 Buckingham Gate, S.W. 1.

THE FOLLOWING PAMPHLETS issued by the Association are still in print and can be purchased by members. Price 1s. net.

1907-27

- 10 Romance. By W. P. Ker, LL.D.
- 11 What still remains to be done for the Scottish Dialects. By W. Grant.
- 20 The Uses of Poetry. By A. C. Bradley, Litt.D.
- 21 English Literature in Schools. A list of Authors and Works for Successive Stages of Study.
- 22 Some Characteristics of Scots Literature. By J. C. Smith.
- 23 Short Bibliographies of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats.
- 24 A Discourse on Modern Sibyls. By Lady Ritchie.
- 25 The Future of English Poetry. By Edmund Gosse, C.B., LL.D.
- 26 The Teaching of English at the Universities. By Sir Stanley Leathes. With a note by W. P. Ker, LL.D.
- 29 Bibliographies of Swinburne, Morris, and Rossetti. By C. E. Vaughan, Litt.D.
- 30 Wordsworth's Patriotic Poems and their Significance To-day. By F. S. Boas, LL.D.
- 31 The Use of Comic Episodes in Tragedy. By W. H. Hadow.
- 32 On Concentration and Suggestion in Poetry. By Sir Sidney Colvin, D.Litt.
- 34 Poetry and the Child. By J. Dover Wilson.
- 36 Poetry in the Light of War. By C. F. E. Spurgeon.
- 37 English Papers in Examinations for Pupils of School Age in England and Wales.
- 38 War and English Poetry. By the Most Hon. the Marquess of Crewe, K.G.
- 40 The Study of Poetry. By E. de Sélincourt, D.Litt.
- 41 The Perspective of Biography. By Sir Sidney Lee, D.Litt.
- 42 Some Remarks on Translation and Translators. By J. S. Phillimore.
- 44 Sir Henry Wotton, with some General Reflections on Style in English Poetry. By the Right Hon. H. H. Asquith.

PR4963 .R6

Roberts, Sydney Castle

Lord Macaulay: the pre-eminent

Victorian.

ISSUED TO

81579

bers, C.B.
H. Fowler.
niversities of England. By R. W.
ohn Bailey.
mund Gosse, C.B., LL.D.
S. Omond.

hn Buchan.

Sir Sidney Lee and Sir Edmund

. Chambers, D.Lit.
r. By Laurence Binyon, LL.D.
Sir Philip Hartog, C.I.E., LL.D.

and Literature.

OUT OF PRINT

Nos. 1 (Types of English Curricula in Boys' Secondary Schools), 2 (The Teaching of Shakespeare in Secondary Schools), 3 (A Short List of Books on English Literature from the beginning to 1832, for the use of Teachers), 4 (Shelley's View of Poetry, by A. C. Bradley, Litt.D.), 5 (English Literature in Secondary Schools, by J. H. Fowler), 6 (The Teaching of English in Girls' Secondary Schools, by Miss G. Clement), 7 (The Teaching of Shakespeare in Schools), 8 (Types of English Curricula in Girls' Secondary Schools), 9 (Milton and Party, by O. Elton, D.Litt.), 12 (Summary of Examinations in English affecting Schools), 13 (The Impersonal Aspect of Shakespeare's Art, by Sir Sidney Lee, D.Litt.), 14 (Early Stages in the Teaching of English), 16 (The Bearing of English Studies upon the National Life, by C. H. Herford, Litt.D.), 17 (The Teaching of English Composition, by J. H. Fowler), 18 (The Teaching of Literature in French and German Secondary Schools, by Elizabeth Lee), 19 (John Bunyan, by C. H. Firth, LL.D.), 27 (Poetry and Contemporary Speech, by Lascelles Abercrombie), 28 (The Poet and the Artist, and what they can do for us, by G. C. Moore Smith, Litt.D.), 33 (School Libraries, by J. H. Fowler), 35 (The Eighteenth Century, by W. P. Ker, LL.D.), 39 (The Reaction against Tennyson, by A. C. Bradley, Litt.D.), 43 (The Teaching of English in Schools), 45 (The Greek Strain in English Literature, by John Burnet, F.B.A.), 46 (A Reference Library: English Language and Literature), 47 (The Normality of Shakespeare illustrated in his Treatment of Love and Marriage, by C. H. Herford, Litt.D.), 48 (Don Quixote. Some War-time Reflections on its Character and Influence, by H. J. C. Grierson, LL.D.), 49 (A Note on the Teaching of 'English Language and Literature' with some Suggestions, by R. B. McKerrow, Litt.D.), 50 (The Light Reading of our Ancestors, by the Right Hon. Lord Ernle, M.V.O.), and 57 (Wordsworth's *Prelude*, by the Right Hon. Viscount Grey of Fallodon, K.G.).

Any member having copies to spare of Pamphlets Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 27, 33, 35, 39, 43, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, and 57, or of 'Dialogue' by Anthony Hope Dawkins, or of Bulletins Nos. 1, 6, 9, 10, 12, 33, 38, 45, and 49 is requested to communicate with the Secretary.

Members can obtain further copies of the *Bulletin* (price 6d., postage extra) on application to the Secretary.

TRENT UNIVERSITY



0 1164 0300805 9

**BRO
DART**

MADE IN U.S.A.

